

SKIP VICHNESS*A Period of Growth and Increased
Collaboration among the Camps and with JTS*REFLECTIONS ON BEING THE
NATIONAL RAMAH PRESIDENT

OVER THE YEARS, when thinking about Ramah, I find myself using a biblical-sounding phrase. To me, “Ramah is a jealous god.” My experience is that when Maḥaneh Ramah reaches out and grabs hold of people, it does so in a way that is all consuming. Once you become a “Ramahnik” you are always a Ramahnik—even if your experience at camp happened twenty, thirty, forty, or more years ago.

For me, that process began on a Sunday in December of 1977 as I found myself driving from Princeton, New Jersey to the upper west side of Manhattan. I was going to an interview at The Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) for a position as the business manager of Camp Ramah in the Berkshires.

As I recall, the decision to go to the interview was more of a lark than a serious exploration. After all, I was already happily employed in camping at a terrific private camp (Pine Forest) by two wonderful families (the Blacks and the Halperns, who have remained dear friends and mentors throughout my career). To top it all off, I had never heard of JTS or Camp Ramah!

However, at that interview I met three amazing couples, whose commitment, passion, and concern would help to change my life. The Davidsons (Pat and Al), Schlesingers (Lisa and Jim), and Siegels (Pauline and Noel) questioned me extensively that morning as to my background, while at the same time communicating how much Ramah Berkshires could use me and the good I could do. As I was going on and on about my camping background,

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particularly the ten great summers I spent at Camp Greylock for Boys, little did I know that both the Schlesingers and Siegels had family members who knew me from those days.

Any doubts I had about taking the position at Ramah Berkshires were overcome by two events in the following days. Within a week of the first interview, I was invited to White Plains, New York, to meet with the chair of the Berkshires board, Dr. Saul Shapiro, and his wife, Miriam Klein Shapiro, ז"ל, *rosh binnuch* at camp. This interview took place mostly in Miriam's kitchen and around the dinner table with their five terrific children and assorted friends.

As the evening went on, my hesitations about becoming part of this environment began to melt away. The Shapiro family gave me a vision of what Jewish institutional camping could provide a family that a private camp could not. Even though I was still single at the time, I could feel a resonance for the kind of home I hoped to create for myself someday.

Saul had been chair of the Berkshires board for quite a while and would remain so during my entire tenure at the camp. There is no doubt that without his energy, commitment, and skill, this Ramah camp would not have survived the turbulent '70s. For me, Saul was the great teacher. He provided the *dugmah* of what a great lay leader should be in his relationship with a professional. He was generous of spirit and time. He was both a protector and an instructor. There was an amazing sense of partnership that he created that made professional/lay relations a joy. Over the years that I have chaired a number of not-for-profit organizations, I have tried to follow his example in the best way I could.

And what about Miriam? She was passionate, giving, smart, and determined. She was the perfect professional who never acted as the boss's wife. She learned that to deal with me, she first had to share news of the day and family, and I learned from her what it meant to combine being the most passionate, knowledgeable, and caring person in the room. She helped to teach me what Ramah was about, while also taking the time to learn what I was about and what I was trying to accomplish. I often think back to those first years when I was trying to make significant changes in the Ramah summer culture—without Miriam's guidance, I might not have survived those early years at Ramah.

A few days after dinner at the Shapiro home, I received a phone call from Joe Kruger, ז"ל, who was a member of the Berkshires board. As the founder and director for over fifty-four years of Camp MahKeeNac, Joe was one of the great legends of private camping. Joe was a great camp director and an even greater mensch. Over a delicious breakfast at his home, he explained to me how important it was that people with a private camp background involve

themselves in the not-for-profit camp world. By the time I left his home that morning I had agreed to take the job—it was impossible to say no to Joe. One of the best by-products of my Ramah experience was the chance to become friendly with Joe and Frances Kruger, ז"ל—a friendship that taught me a tremendous amount about both camping and my responsibility to the Jewish community. This wonderful opportunity to know and learn from Joe lasted until he passed away at the age of 92—still vital and insightful up to a few days before he left us.

So on February 1, 1978, I showed up to work at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. There was a bookkeeper (Selma Leibowitz, ז"ל), a recruiter (Gershon Schwartz, ז"ל), and a maintenance director (Stanley Michelson). There was no director. National Ramah Director Burt Cohen was hiring the staff, and there were fewer than 100 children enrolled in camp. From February to the opening of camp in June was an amazing time for me. I made friends that would last a lifetime—Dr. Joel Roth, Phyllis Hofman Waldmann, and Steve Goldstein, to name just a few.

I traveled day and night throughout the New York metropolitan area to recruit campers. We opened camp in 1978 with more than 400 children. Just before camp opened, Rabbi Moshe Samber of Plainfield, New Jersey, came on board as the part-time director. In 1979 we opened with a full camp! Moshe and I had two terrific summers together.

That first summer, I reconnected with my Jewish roots and found the Ramah experience to be so much more than what camp had been in the past for me. To make sure I had someone to talk to that summer, I brought with me a boyhood friend, David Ellenson, who had become a Reform rabbi. David had a great summer and then went on to establish himself as one of the great scholars of the American Jewish community. He is currently the president of Hebrew Union College.

However, the most important event of that summer was meeting a young teacher named Ilana Arnold. Ilana, an Israeli by birth, came to camp as a teacher. It was a magical summer for us as we developed a relationship that quickly blossomed. We were married the following April in a celebration that included many of our Ramah friends. Ilana would become an important part of the Berkshires community as she worked as a teacher and then as the *mashgihah*, as well as being the hostess to many wonderful evenings at our camp home on Lake Ellis.

In 1980 Rabbi Jerome Abrams came to camp as the director. He was Ramah's most experienced camp leader, having previously served as the director of Ramah Wisconsin and Ramah Berkshires. Jerry had an excellent understanding of how to run a camp and what made Ramah special. Not only did

he do a tremendous job of taking control of the camp and, almost instantly, making it a better place, he took the time to make me understand what it really meant to be a Ramahnik. He and his wife Leah became close friends and colleagues.

Jerry gave me the freedom to do my job while also encouraging me to grow and take on more responsibility. It was one of the best team experiences I have ever had. It taught me how a senior mentor could make the people around him feel empowered and significant. It is a lesson that I have tried to implement since leaving Ramah and one for which I owe Jerry a tremendous debt.

I spent six wonderful years at Camp Ramah in the Berkshires. Enrollment was excellent, finances were under control, and with a supportive board, we began to renovate and build up the facility. The best thing that happened was the birth of our son during the summer of 1982. Shai was born in New Milford Hospital on the Friday morning of visitors weekend. We brought him home to camp that Saturday evening at age thirty-six hours. I believe he is the youngest Ramahnik ever.

Another highlight of my time at Ramah was the chance to consult for the National Ramah Commission. Under National Director Burt Cohen, I spent two years visiting other Ramah camps and working with the lay and professional leadership of those camps to improve their business and physical plants. As I visited all the Ramah camps in North America, I began to understand the tremendous impact that Ramah was having on the greater Jewish community.

During these travels, I met an remarkable group of lay and professional leaders with whom I developed special relationships. From Sid Zweig, z"l, in Canada to Rabbi David Soloff in Wisconsin to a host of others, it became apparent to me that the appeal of Ramah and its impact was not unique to any one geographical area or individual camp. Working with Burt to understand the issues and personalities that existed in each camp gave me a much more nuanced way of looking at institutions.

These were fantastic years for us—the camp community, our home community of Summit, New Jersey, the warmth of Rabbi Bill and Dina Horn, and the greater JTS community, as well as a growing group of family and friends, made for years that seemed to fly by. However, for us, it became apparent that there would be a “right” time to move on from Ramah.

In 1981, I had been asked to join the board of the New York section of the American Camping Association (ACA). Two years later I became a member of the executive board, serving as the section’s secretary. Attending ACA meetings opened a whole new world of relationships to me as I became friendly

with some of the great camp directors of the generation. Among them was a fabulous Long Island day camp owner named Ben Appelbaum, z"l.

The relationship that Ilana and I had with Ben and his wife, Barbara, z"l, quickly grew into what would become a life-long friendship that changed our lives. In early 1983, we began talking about the possibility of the Appelbaums and Vichnesses going into business together. We would do the work, Ben and Barbara would put up the money, and we would buy a day camp together. All we had to do was find a camp that we could buy—not an easy task!

However, at the conclusion of the 1983 season, we were able to purchase Harbor Hills Day Camp in Randolph, New Jersey. So the time had come and at the end of the 1983 season, we made the announcement that we were leaving Ramah. It had been a magical six years. I left with so much more than I had come with—a wife, two children, friendships that have lasted a lifetime, and a commitment to the values of the Conservative Movement. In return for all we had received, hopefully we left Ramah Berkshires and the Ramah Camping Movement better off than we had found it.

For the next ten years we set upon the task of building our business. Harbor Hills grew quickly into one of the largest day camps in New Jersey, and with Ben we were able to purchase a number of other day camps in the New York Metropolitan area. I was able to find time to serve as president of the New York section of the American Camping Association and as president of the Solomon Schechter Day School of Essex and Union. These were wonderful lay positions and, combined with family demands and our growing business, kept us well occupied. Although many of our friends from Ramah days remained, I gave little thought or interest to Ramah. It was clear to me that it was a time that had passed in our lives.

All of this changed in 1992, when Saul Shapiro called me and asked if we could get together for lunch. Saul was entering into a second term as president of the National Ramah Commission (NRC) and in a few, well-chosen words made it clear to me that he wanted me to join the board to help him complete his vision of leadership for the movement. In thinking about this opportunity, it became clear that given all that our family owed to Saul and to the Ramah Camping Movement, this was something that I not only should take on but also that I wanted to do. And so began my second career at Ramah as a lay leader.

In the early 90s the NRC was an institution in transition. Under Saul's leadership and with a new, younger generation of camp presidents and other board members, such as Alan Silberman, Paul Schultz, Roger Fine, and others, there was a feeling that the Ramah Camping Movement increasingly must

become an organization that spoke with one united voice rather than what for many years had been a collection of individual institutions, albeit under the unifying educational and religious leadership of JTS.

The steps to make Ramah more of a cohesive movement were ignited by the appointment of Rabbi Sheldon Dorph as National Ramah Director and the encouragement and active interest of Chancellor Ismar Schorsch. Throughout his tenure, the Chancellor remained an amazingly active, eloquent, and supportive leader for Ramah. Many of the positive changes that happened to Ramah for the following fifteen years can be attributed to his wisdom.

In 1994, a smooth transition of leadership of the movement took place as Alan Silberman became the president of the NRC. Alan, a lifelong Ramahnik and a past president of Ramah Wisconsin, proved to be a wise and skilled leader to whom the movement owes an enormous debt. For me, his wise counsel and friendship are among my most valued benefits of my time in service to Ramah.

Along with Alan, Shelly, and Chancellor Schorsch, one other major individual was vital to the changes that began to occur within the Ramah Camping Movement: Rabbi Michael Greenbaum, the vice chancellor of JTS. In his role, he provides wisdom and support and serves as the active JTS representative to Ramah. One of the great benefits of being a National Ramah leader was the opportunity to develop a close working relationship with Michael. During all my years at the NRC, he was my teacher and wise counsel.

In 1994, this wonderful combination of leadership and events, combined with the vision of Eric Singer, a young man from Atlanta, brought Ramah to its first opportunity for growth in over thirty years. The dream of a camp in the southern United States had been a long-standing one. Now it would finally become a reality. Although it was not an easy task, the NRC was able to confront the issues of growth and change in a way that set the tone for expansion within the movement that would last for the next decade. I am very proud to have had some small part in making this dream a reality and helping to create what has become a major institution in the North American Jewish community.

As Ramah entered the late 1990s, a major change took place in the professional leadership of the Ramah movement. Rabbi Stanley Bramnick had come to the NRC in the 1960s to serve as National Business Manager and to expand, under the leadership of his friend Rabbi Al Thaler, the Ramah Day Camp in Nyack, New York. Although the day camp was a major success, Rabbi Bramnick's primary commitment to the Ramah Camping Movement was to put the NRC on a sound financial footing. Additionally, he was a steady voice urging the other camps to place themselves on a firm financial footing.

Although his was not always a popular message, his commitment to fiscal stability on a national and local level has proven to be a major factor in Ramah's renewed growth and development over the past decade.

With Rabbi Bramnick's upcoming retirement in 1998, the decision was made to bring in an individual with wide-ranging business experience to lead the business affairs of National Ramah. With Shelly Dorph leading the search, we were able to locate a young lawyer who was looking to make a change from being a litigator to a more satisfying environment in which to work and raise a family. Jeff Goodman was a terrific addition to the Ramah scene. In his decade as National Business Manager, Jeff has become a major factor in both the smooth operation of the national office, its Israel programs, and an important resource for all of the camps.

In the spring of 1998, I was asked to take on the chairmanship of the National Ramah Commission. Following Saul Shapiro and Alan Silberman was a daunting assignment. In addition to obtaining the support of my family and partners, there were a number of factors within the Ramah movement itself that led me to take on this opportunity for leadership:

- The NRC had an outstanding professional leader who wanted to take an activist role in improving and expanding the camps. National Director Rabbi Shelly Dorph, had come to the position with a vision of making the entity more of a movement rather than just a group of individual camps. It was a vision that we shared.

- In addition to Shelly, the NRC had a group of outstanding professionals who insured that each program and effort undertaken by the national office would be of the highest quality. Jeff Goodman was quickly making his mark on our business operations. Amy Skopp Cooper had taken over Ramah Day Camp in Nyack and had made a great program even greater. And finally, the Ramah Israel programs were led in an expansive and effective way by Dr. David Breakstone.

- The JTS leadership, Chancellor Ismar Schorsch and Vice Chancellor Michael Greenbaum, were committed to the success of Ramah and to using JTS resources to insure its continued vibrancy. These two men offered a superb lay-professional opportunity that included regular meetings, constant support, and profound insight. They are two leaders of vision and integrity who kept their commitment to me and helped make the Ramah chairmanship a source of constant delight. Ramah has no better friends and supporters.

- A team of lay leaders agreed to take leadership positions with me. Alan Silberman agreed to serve as senior vice president—he was to be an active partner throughout my tenure as president. He was always willing to take on the difficult and sensitive tasks. Without Alan, my job would have

been much more difficult. Another lifelong Ramahnik, Gerry Kobell, a resident of Pittsburgh and a lay leader from Ramah New England, agreed to serve as vice president for finance and operations. In Gerry's key position within the national structure, his knowledge of camp and strong sense of integrity combined to make him an important member of the team. Paul Schultz, from California, and Saul Andron, from Berkshires, agreed to serve as vice presidents for Israel. As I describe later, these two gentlemen would deal with some of the most difficult issues in the history of Ramah and they would accomplish this with sensitivity, ability, and dedication. Along with Michael Greenbaum, who served as NRC secretary, they rounded out our slate of officers.

- One other member of the NRC took on a key role. Ed Zinbarg is one of the great leaders of the Conservative Movement, with a fierce commitment to JTS and Ramah. His generosity created the Shapiro Fellowship Program, which has had a major impact by enabling JTS Rabbinical School students to work at Ramah during the summer. To my good fortune, he agreed to serve as chair of the NRC Insurance Committee. Under Ed's leadership, and with guidance from Jeff Goodman, the movement made significant changes in its insurance program that have resulted in large savings for our camps. Ramah continues to benefit greatly from its relationship with Henry Skier, who, together with his children, provides outstanding insurance coverage, as well as support and advice.

- Finally, I was fortunate to have a dedicated group of camp presidents who came to the NRC with a strong commitment to making their camps better and a willingness to work together to make Ramah more effective and better able to serve the Conservative Movement. These men and women gave an amazing amount of time to both their local camps and to the NRC. Serving as president of a Ramah camp has to be both one of the most challenging and rewarding of all lay leadership positions within the Jewish community.

All of these factors—a talented and activist professional leadership, a wonderful slate of lay colleagues, and the support of JTS and camps that for the most part, had stable and quality professional leadership, made the prospect of leading the NRC a most exciting one.

I came to the position with an agenda to achieve four goals during my term. Now, almost ten years later, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to reflect that most of them were accomplished.

1. Historically, the NRC had operated as a loose confederation of camps and a place where the needs and concerns of individual camps had been represented and protected. Often, these legitimate concerns prevented the “movement” from acting like a movement and making strategic decisions that were best for the entire Conservative Movement. Under the skillful leadership

of Saul Shapiro and Alan Silberman this began to change dramatically. The founding of Ramah Darom was a definite watershed in this change. During my tenure, we worked hard to form the NRC into a board of directors that dealt with movement-wide issues. Energized committees, active professional communication beyond the director level, and a regular bringing together of the camp presidents took us a long way down this road. Over time, Ramah has become a movement that is capable of thinking strategically about its future as a vital part of the North American Jewish community. The NRC can take a great deal of credit for this.

2. There is no better vehicle for creating large numbers of committed Conservative Jews than Ramah. When I became president, the camps were basically full. At the urging of Chancellor Schorsch, we made a commitment to encourage the camps to expand their facilities and capacities to the maximum possible. Many of the camps responded to this strategic initiative by increasing their capacity by ten percent. This, combined with the steady growth of Ramah Darom, meant that from 1997 to 2003 the enrollment of the camps grew significantly.

3. For years, the NRC had operated a day camp in Nyack, New York. Rabbi Al Thaler had created a magnificent program. Upon his retirement, the camp came under the directorship of Amy Skopp Cooper. Amy is a great asset to our movement. Having observed the Ramah Day Camp in Nyack, its impact on campers, and the number of campers that went on to Ramah overnight camping, Shelly Dorph and I became convinced that creating Ramah day camps in other locations would be a positive way of furthering Ramah's mission. Starting in 1998, Ramah day camps were opened in Chicago, Philadelphia, East Brunswick, New Jersey, and the San Francisco Bay area. As with any new project, there were growing pains, but over time the camps in Chicago and Philadelphia have succeeded and evolved into successful entry points into Ramah and the Conservative Movement for young families.

4. Over its sixty years, Ramah has developed a reputation for outstanding Judaic programming. Data shows that Ramah camps do an exceptional job of creating identity, observance, and lifelong commitment. However, as with any institution, there is always room for improvement. In the '80s and '90s, many significant changes occurred in the world of camping. Although Ramah remained on the cutting edge of Judaic programming, a number of us felt that its "camping" programs needed to be refreshed. To accomplish this, with Shelly's leadership and the support of camp presidents and directors, we made a commitment to bringing Ramah lay and professional leadership together to engage with leading practitioners from the greater world of camping. I am proud that many of my partners and friends in the private camping world have

been active and willing participants in this effort. These interchanges, both formal and informal, have led to upgraded facilities, increased programming options—particularly in the adventure area—and more dynamic and choice-oriented options for campers. Today, it is normative for all Ramah directors to learn and share from other camps in their efforts to make Ramah the very best possible camping experience for our campers.

As in every leadership experience, not everything goes as planned, and not every eventuality can be anticipated. However, our major accomplishment, watching the NRC evolve into a cohesive and efficient group, bore direct results in dealing with two difficult issues.

In the spring of 2000, the director of Ramah Programs in Israel, Dr. David Breakstone, resigned his position effective September 1, 2000. David had done a wonderful job of growing our Israel programs, and we were sorry to see him go, but he was leaving to become the head of the Department for Zionist Activity of the World Zionist Organization. We chose Dr. Joe Freedman as the new director. Joe has done an excellent job and has brought energy and vision to the position, bringing our Israel programs to an ever-higher level.

Unfortunately, within days of Joe's beginning the position, the second intifada broke out. Instead of growth, security became the primary issue. Although over 200 Ramahniks attended our Ramah Seminar in Israel in 2001, our "short-term" programs began to suffer.

By the winter of 2002, the security situation in Israel had deteriorated significantly. All of the groups that had planned to go to Israel with Ramah during the winter cancelled, and enrollment in our summer Seminar was at an all-time low. Fortunately, over the years, Ramah Programs in Israel had built up a significant cash surplus and was able to keep its doors open. However, Joe Freedman was forced to let go a number of our staff. Those were painful days as the news from Israel led to a continuous downward spiral of enrollment in Ramah's Israel programs.

As a contingency, the NRC instructed our staff to consider plans for a Seminar summer that would not include Israel! Having this discussion was painful, but it was prudent to have contingencies available. Travel to Europe and South America was discussed, as was an American Seminar to be held at the new American Hebrew Academy in Greensboro, North Carolina.

At the spring meeting of the NRC, Seminar enrollment was at its lowest point in years. At the time, the NRC was still committed to a Seminar in Israel, but a vote was taken to hold a special meeting by phone in May to make a final decision. Enrollment continued to deteriorate, as withdrawals occurred on a regular basis.

As the weeks went by, the news became worse, and the pressure on us to cancel Seminar increased. A number of national organizations, including the Union for Reform Judaism, decided to cancel their trips for the summer of 2002. The *New York Times* carried a daily litany of bad news about events in Israel, the large decrease in tourism, and the cancellation of educational missions and junior-year-in-college programs abroad.

Finally, one evening in mid-May at 8:30 p.m., a conference call was held with all the members of the NRC, our professional staff in New York, and Joe Freedman in Israel. From San Diego, Chicago, Toronto, New York, Jerusalem, and a number of other cities, people weighed in with their opinions and best judgments. It was a thoughtful discussion as lay and professional leaders alike weighed their responsibilities to our children and their families, balanced by their commitment to Israel.

By around 11 p.m. it was time to vote — as one board member observed, it was bed time on the east coast, the sun was setting on the west coast, and the sun was rising in Jerusalem. In a historic vote, the NRC decided the following:

- The NRC was committed to sending the Seminar to Israel for the summer of 2002, even if only twenty campers were willing to participate. Ultimately, there were seventy-two participants.
- We would cancel only if the Israeli authorities told us they were not allowing groups to come.
- We would inform each family that if they chose not to send their children to Israel, we would understand, and we would offer an alternative program for them. Not a single parent with a child enrolled chose to take this option for his or her child. The parents told us that if Ramah told them their children would be safe, then they were sure they would be.

The final vote was taken by roll call. In the end, the vote was unanimous. If parents did not want to send their children to Israel that summer we understood and would be supportive of their decision. However, as a movement, we were committed to standing tall and publicly demonstrating our commitment to Eretz Yisra'el and our faith in the Israeli government and our professional staff to keep our children safe.

I believe this was one of the proudest moments in the history of Ramah. For me, it was far and away my greatest and most satisfying experience as a lay leader. And the children who went on Seminar 2002 had an inspiring experience and a memory that will last for the rest of their lives.

In the fall of 1999, I was asked to come to a meeting with Shelly Dorph, Jeff Goodman, and long-time Ramah operations consultant Phyllis Hofman Waldmann to discuss Camp Ramah in New England. For several years the

camp had not had stable leadership and was experiencing a steady decline in enrollment. From a financial point of view, there were serious issues as to the camp's fiscal integrity.

The camp did have a strong core of new, energized lay leadership led by the incoming president, Jerry Silverman. Shelly and I agreed that a cohesive and strategic approach was vital to the long-term success of the camp. It would have been disastrous for the Ramah Camping Movement to close this camp or to allow the camp to meander along with the problems it had been laboring under for a number of years.

At this meeting, our professional leadership made a generous and positive suggestion. With the consent of the NRC and the cooperation of the board of Ramah New England, the National Ramah office would take over the day-to-day operation of the camp for the 2000 season. This would give the New England leadership the opportunity to take a deep breath and put quality professional leadership in place for the 2001 season and beyond.

Both boards quickly endorsed this suggestion. Shelly took over the role as director of Camp Ramah in New England, and Jeff Goodman took control of their office and business operations. They served in these roles, while at the same time keeping the national agenda moving forward. It was an outstanding performance. Not only did the camp increase enrollment, but it broke even financially! Using the "time out," the board was able to hire Billy Mencow as the director, who remained for a number of years, and Joel Stavsky, an outstanding business manager who came on board in May and is still a key figure in the current success of Ramah New England.

With the support and vision of the National Ramah Commission, Shelly was given the time and support to model what a Ramah camp should be and the values that a Ramah director should hold as important. It was a most impressive performance. And although some aspects of the National Ramah agenda may have suffered during 2000–2001, there is no doubt that the ability of the NRC to respond to the problems of one of the camps in a positive way made an enormous contribution to Ramah New England and to the entire Ramah movement.

The five years I served as NRC President seemed to fly along—we accomplished a lot, and we actually had fun doing it. There was a wonderful feeling of camaraderie and shared purpose that even made handling the difficult issues a positive experience.

In the spring of 2003, Shelly announced that he would be leaving the position of National Ramah Director after completing a fall sabbatical. Shelly had done an excellent job. His activist approach to the position had changed the nature and relationship of the National Director to the local camps and

their directors. His vision had energized the movement and helped ignite a growth spurt that had not occurred at Ramah for over thirty-five years.

With Shelly's announcement, the Chancellor and I quickly agreed on a choice for a new director, who was ratified by the NRC at its spring meeting. Rabbi Mitchell Cohen, a lawyer turned rabbi, turned camp director, had been the outstanding leader of Camp Ramah in Canada for eleven years. Feeling that he had fulfilled his vision there, he had moved on to be the founding principal of the Solomon Schechter High School of Westchester County, New York. However, his heart was always with Ramah, and we were able to recruit Mitch to come back to his first love—camping. After all, as I said at the beginning of this article—"Ramah is a jealous god," and no one ever leaves.

At the same time that Mitch was appointed, the NRC nominating committee proposed a slate of new officers, who would take office in the fall of 2003. Mort Steinberg, outgoing president of Ramah Wisconsin, was elected to follow me as NRC President. Mort is an outstanding leader who has been at the heart of the success of Ramah Wisconsin as camper, staff member, board member, and president for almost fifty years. He came to the position with a clear vision of Ramah and his own agenda for his term of office. I was honored to be succeeded by him.

Thus, as I left my "job" in the fall of 2003, the NRC had a wonderful face for the future—young and dynamic professional leadership in Mitch Cohen, Jeff Goodman, and Amy Skopp Cooper; a committed and visionary group of camp presidents; and a talented national lay leadership. This team heralded nothing but better days ahead for the entire Ramah community.

For me, I know that all good things must come to an end, but what a fabulous five years I had as the "leader" of Ramah!